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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

AID-05 EB-07 CIEP-01 TRSE-00 STR-01 OMB-01 CEA-01

FRB-03 NIC-01 /076 W

----- 099022

R 281639Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8760

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 03116

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT. PFOR, UK, EEC

SUBJECT: REACTION TO EC REFERENDUM WHITE PAPER

REF: LONDON 2943

SUMMARY - AS ANTICIPATED, GOVERNMENT WHITE PAPER ON
PROPOSED EC REFERENDUM (REFTEL) TRIGGERED FUROR IN
PARLIAMENT AND OUTSIDE. INITIAL REACTION RANGED FROM
REASONED CRITICISM TO OUTRIGHT HOSTILITY, WITH PROPOSED
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SINGLE NATION-WIDE VOTE COUNT THE FOCUS OF MOST OPPOSI-

TION. INTRODUCTION OF DRAFT LEGISLATION, WHICH GOVERNMENT HAS PROMISED BEFORE EASTER RECESS, WILL PRECIPITATE BITTER DEBATE IN COMMONS AND STRAIN PARLIAMENTARY LABOR PARTY (PLP) COHESION. THE OUTCOME IS BY NO MEANS CERTAIN. END SUMMARY

1. INITIAL RESPONSES TO WILSON GOVERNMENT'S WHITE PAPER ON EC REFERENDUM (REFTEL) WERE ALMOST UNIVERSALLY CRITICAL. DEPUTY CONSERVATIVE LEADER WILLIAM WHITELAW REITERATED HIS PARTY'S OPPOSITION TO REFERENDUM, BUT ACKNOWLEDGED THAT IT WILL PROBABLY BE HELD. TORY BACKBENCHERS, ACCORDING TO PRESS, WERE OPENLY HOSTILE TO WHITE PAPER, ESPECIALLY GOVERNMENT DECISION TO HONOR RESULT REGARDLESS VOTER TURNOUT. SHADOW CABINET FEB. 27 ANNOUNCED IT WILL OPPOSE REFERENDUM BILL, AND CONSERVATIVE PARTY SOURCES TELL EMBOFF THAT THEY PLAN LINE-BY-LINE DEBATE OF LEGISLATION, FOCUSING ON CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTION. SHADOW FOREIGN SECRETARY REGINALD MAUDLING WILL REPORTEDLY LEAD CONSERVATIVE DEBATE IN COMMONS, BUT THERE HAS BEEN SPECULATION THAT EDWARD HEATH WILL PLAY IMPORTANT ROLE AS WELL.

2. LIBERAL PARTY CAUCUS FOLLOWING RELEASE OF WHITE PAPER AGREED NOT TO COMMIT PARTY ON FINAL VOTE, AND SPOKESMAN DAVID STEEL TOLD PRESS LIBERALS' ULTIMATE POSITION ON REFERENDUM WILL DEPEND ON CONCESSIONS THEY ARE ABLE TO EXTRACT FROM GOVERNMENT -- LIBERALS ARE KNOWN TO SUPPORT REFERENDUM PRINCIPLE WHICH THEY BELIEVE SHOULD BE EXTENDED TO OTHER IMPORTANT NATIONAL QUESTIONS, E.G. INTRODUCTION OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION. LIBERAL LEADER JEREMY THORPE EARLIER TOLD POLITICAL COUNSELOR THAT HE SUPPORTS SINGLE NATIONAL COUNT, AS TALLY BY REGION WOULD INTENSIFY DIVISIVE FORCES WHICH THREATEN TO SPLIT UK. WE UNDERSTAND, HOWEVER, LIBERAL PARLIAMENTARY BLOC IS DIVIDED ON THIS ISSUE.

3. SCOTTISH AND WELSH NATIONALIST PARTIES STRONGLY OPPOSE SINGLE NATIONAL TALLY PROVISION AND HAVE THREATENED TO CARRY OUT THEIR OWN REGIONAL REFERENDUM IF PARLIAMENT APPROVES GOVERNMENT PROPOSAL. SCOTTISH EC SPOKESWOMAN
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WINIFRED EWING APPEARED ON PLATFORM OF "GET BRITAIN OUT" CAMPAIGN PRESS CONFERENCE FOLLOWING RELEASE OF WHITE PAPER, ALONG WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF CONSERVATIVE AND LABOR ANTI-MARKET GROUPS AND TRADE UNIONIST CLIVE JENKINS. THEY CHARGED, INTER ALIA, THAT THE "STAY IN" PHRASE IN THE GOVERNMENT'S SUGGESTED REFERENDUM QUESTION WAS LOADED IN FAVOR OF CONTINUED MEMBERSHIP.

4. PLP BACKBENCHERS WERE ALSO CRITICAL OF WHITE PAPER. ANTI-MARKETEERS ARE NOT SATISFIED WITH GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSALS REGARDING PROPAGANDA, AND SCOTTISH AND WELSH MPS ARE TROUBLED BY NATIONAL TALLY WHICH THEY BELIEVE WILL INTENSIFY REGIONAL RESENTMENT THAT CAN BE EXPLOITED BY NATIONALIST PARTIES. ONE SCOTTISH BACKBENCHER (ANTI-MARKETEER) TOLD EMBOFF THAT REFERENDUM COUNT ISSUE IS EXTREMELY HARD DILEMMA, AND, WHILE HE FAVORS REGIONAL TALLY, HE IS NOT PREPARED TO FIGHT HARD FOR IT, AS NATIONALISTS WILL GAIN EITHER WAY. HE ALSO OPINED THAT PLP LEADERSHIP WILL HAVE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TIME MAINTAINING DISCIPLINE WHEN COMMONS VOTES ON REFERENDUM

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NIC-01 /076 W

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R 281639Z FEB 75

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LEGISLATION. ANOTHER STRAW IN WIND WAS LORD GEORGE-BROWN'S STATEMENT IN FEB. 27 TELEVISION INTERVIEW THAT HE IS "INCLINED" TO TRY TO BLOCK LEGISLATION IN LORDS, AND THAT SUCH AN EFFORT WOULD SUCCEED IF SHADOW CABINET IS PREPARED TO DELIVER CONSERVATIVE VOTES IN LORDS. WILLIAM HAMLING, WILSON'S PPS, HOWEVER, TOLD EMBOFF THAT GOVERNMENT BELIEVES IT CAN HOLD PLP TOGETHER WITHOUT CONCESSION ON NATIONAL VOTE COUNT, PICK UP SOME LIBERAL
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SUPPORT, AND POSSIBLY CARRY SNP (WHICH WANTS REFERENDUM FOR ITS OWN PURPOSES) AND ULSTER UNIONISTS (WHO ALSO HAVE VESTED INTEREST IN REFERENDUM PRINCIPLE). LABOR PARTY ALSO ANNOUNCED SPECIAL PARTY CONFERENCE ON EC RENEGOTIATION IS SCHEDULED FOR MAY 17 IN LONDON.

5. MEDIA ARE GIVING EXTENSIVE COVERAGE TO WHITE PAPER AND REACTION THERETO. TIMES (WHICH OPPOSES REFERENDUM) CALLED FOR REFERENDUM OPPONENTS IN PARLIAMENT TO AVOID A "WRECKING CAMPAIGN," BUT TO SEEK REGIONAL OR CONSTITUENCY VOTE COUNT AND QUALIFICATION THAT ELECTORAL TURNOUT BE AT LEAST 33 PERCENT FOR VOTE TO BE BINDING ON GOVERNMENT. GUARDIAN (ALSO OPPOSED TO REFERENDUM) ACKNOWLEDGED REFERENDUM WAS INEVITABLE, SUGGESTED THAT GOVERNMENT RECONSIDER ITS DECISION FOR NATION-WIDE TALLY AND CALLED FOR WILSON TO CAMPAIGN ACTIVELY IN SUPPORT OF STAYING IN.

6. PLP CHAIRMAN CLEDWYN HUGHES, AN ARDENT PRO-MARKETEER, FEBRUARY 27 TOLD CHARGE AND EMBOFFS HE IS CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC GOVERNMENT WILL MAKE ITS DEADLINES AND REFERENDUM VOTE WILL FAVOR CONTINUED MEMBERSHIP. HIS SCENARIO ENVISAGES CONCLUSION OF RENEGOTIATIONS AT DUBLIN EC SUMMIT. WILSON, WITH TWO TO ONE SUPPORT IN CABINET, WILL THEN ASK PARLIAMENT TO ENDORSE RENEGOTIATED TERMS, WHICH HUGHES BELIEVES IT WILL DO BY OVERWHELMING MAJORITY. THERE WOULD ENSUE A FINAL VOTE ON REFERENDUM, WHICH WOULD SAIL EASILY THROUGH COMMONS WITH SOME CONSERVATIVE SUPPORT. THESE DEVELOPMENTS WOULD PROVIDE STRONG IMPETUS FOR PRO-MARKET REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN, AND MAJORITY OF VOTERS WOULD THEN ENDORSE CONTINUED MEMBERSHIP. HE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT LORD GEORGE-BROWN COULD THROW A SPANNER IN THE WORKS, AND THAT HE IS TRYING TO PERSUADE THE FORMER DEPUTY LABOR PARTY LEADER NOT TO BLOCK THE REFERENDUM.

7. COMMENT: EARLY REACTION TO WHITE PAPER, WHICH CONTAINED NO SURPRISES, WAS LARGELY AS WE ANTICIPATED. ONCE REFERENDUM LEGISLATION IS INTRODUCED, GOVERNMENT WILL HAVE TO PREVENT CRIPPLING AMENDMENTS; OBTAIN TIMELY PASSAGE; AND MAINTAIN LABOR PARTY COHESION. ALL APPEAR TO BE FORMIDABLE TASKS, AND WILL SEVERELY TRY WILSON'S POLITICAL AND PARLIAMENTARY SKILLS. TIMING OF VARIOUS
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ELEMENTS OF EC QUESTION AND REFERENDUM WILL BE OF VITAL IMPORTANCE. AT LEAST ONE FACTOR, SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION OF RENEGOTIATIONS, IS OUTSIDE HIS CONTROL, AND HE WILL HAVE DIFFICULT TIME CONTROLLING THE OTHER TWO. ACCORDINGLY, WE BELIEVE HUGHES' SCENARIO IS 'ADMINISTRATIVE BEST CASE" WHILE HAMLING, FROM OUR VANTAGE POINT, SEEMS OVERLY OPTIMISTIC. ALTHOUGH WILSON WILL PROBABLY BE ABLE TO STEER REFERENDUM LEGISLATION THROUGH COMMONS IN VERY CLOSE TO ITS PROPOSED FORM, IT WILL BE A VERY DICEY PASSAGE INDEED, BUT THE OUTCOME IN LORDS APPEARS FAR MORE QUESTIONABLE AT THIS TIME.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MEMBERSHIP, PUBLICATIONS, SPECIAL ELECTIONS, RELATIONS WITH REGIONAL ORGS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 28 FEB 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ElyME
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975LONDON03116
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750071-0653
From: LONDON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t1975023/aaaaackw.tel
Line Count: 249
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 LONDON 2943
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ElyME
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 16 APR 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <16 APR 2003 by KelleyW0>; APPROVED <22 SEP 2003 by ElyME>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: REACTION TO EC REFERENDUM WHITE PAPER
TAGS: PINT, PFOR, UK, EEC
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006